

THE MADRAS HERBARIUM AT COIMBATORE (MH)

A. N. HENRY

Botanical Survey of India, Coimbatore

The Madras Herbarium, now known as the herbarium of the Botanical Survey of India, Southern Circle, Coimbatore has to its credit 125 years of fine service. It is regarded as one of the very good herbaria of our country. From its present rented building it is shortly shifted to a new herbarium building of its own, in the campus of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The exact date when the herbarium began is not clearly known. There is, however, some evidence to show that Dr. Hugh Cleghorn, the then Professor of Botany, Madras Medical College, established a herbarium at the Madras Museum, Madras City around 1853. His herbarium specimens along with those of Dr. Drew and Sir W. Elliot bearing the year 1853 under the 'Madras Museum Herbarium' labels appear to have formed the nucleus of the present herbarium. The herbarium was enriched when Dr. Cleghorn became the first Conservator of Forests of Madras Presidency in 1856. Colonel R. H. Beddome who succeeded Dr. Cleghorn, also made significant contributions to the herbarium. He gave his private herbarium containing about 6000 rare specimens mostly of trees and shrubs to the Madras

Museum in consideration of a sum of Rs. 1500/-.

In 1874, Professor M. A. Lawson of the Presidency College, Madras started another herbarium namely "Madras Herbarium" Later when he was appointed as Government Botanist at Ootacamund, the herbarium was shifted to Ootacamund. Perhaps due to bad climatic conditions at Ootacamund, it was brought back to Madras in 1897, and further contribution to the herbarium was made by Dr. A. G. Bourne. Dr. Bourne was acting as Superintendent of Madras Museum during 1897-98, and during this period, the herbarium organised by Prof. Lawson and the Museum herbarium got merged under the name "Madras Herbarium"

The herbarium was transferred to the Government Botanist in 1898-99 when Dr. C. A. Barber took up that appointment as well as that of Director, Botanical Survey of South India. Subsequently with the organisation of the Madras Agricultural Department in 1902, the office of the Government Botanist along with the Madras Herbarium was transferred from Madras to Coimbatore in 1909. Until 1908, the herbarium had nearly 40,000 specimens. It continued to be under Dr. Barber till 1912. He added over 20,000 specimens to the herbarium. From 1912 to 1923, Mr. K.

Rangachariar, Lecturing Botanist was in charge of the herbarium who also added a wealth of valuable specimens to the herbarium. From 1912 up to the end of 1957 the administration of the herbarium was under the hands of such eminent Botanists like Messrs. C. T. Mudaliar, V. Narayanaswami, P. S. Jivanna Rao, K. C. Jacob, S. N. Chandrasekharan, C. R. Mudaliar and T. R. Narayana Iyer. All have played a very significant role in the growth of the herbarium.

PRESENT STATUS

With the setting up of the Southern Circle, Botanical Survey of India at Coimbatore in 1955, the herbarium containing 95,106 specimens representing the flora of the old Madras Presidency, including Mysore, Coorg, Cochin and Travancore, along with specimens representing North India, Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, and other Countries like Europe, Africa, Australia, America, etc., was transferred to this Department on the last day of 1957. As a result of botanical explorations conducted by the staff of the Southern Circle in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, portions of Madhya Pradesh, and the Andamans, 88481 specimens were added to the herbarium making a total of 1,83,587 specimens in the herbarium as on 1.8.1977.

HOLDINGS

The old collections of the herbarium include that of Cleghorn, Drew, Elliot, Beddome, Bidie, Lawson, Bourne, Barber, Wight, Bourdillon, Hooker & Thomson, Perrottet, Rottler, Heyne, Schmid, Rangachariar, Tadulinga Mudaliar, Gamble, Fischer, Narayanaswami, Jivanna Rao, Jacob, Chandrasekharan, Rajasekhara Mudaliar, Sundararaj and others. After taking over of the herbarium

by Botanical Survey of India in 1957, it was enriched by the collections of Subramanyam, Sebastine, Joseph, Shetty, Balakrishnan, Thothathri, Henry, Ellis, Subba Rao, Vajravelu, Ramamurthi, Deb, Sharma, Vivekananthan, Chandrabose, Sreemadhavan, Viswanathan, Rathakrishnan, Naithani, Nair and others.

The herbarium has 1526 type materials representing 623 taxa, and a large number of authentic sheets all confirmed at Kew.

The arrangement of Angiosperm families in the herbarium is adapted with modification from Bentham & Hooker's system. The old and new collections of the herbarium have recently been merged and rearranged according to state-wise, district-wise, etc. under a particular species, following the species numbers as in Flora of British India by J. D. Hooker *et al.* Pteridophytes are kept separately following the sequence of families/genera with modification from Hooker & Baker.

Economic/medicinal plants and garden plants are kept separately in the herbarium. These have popular appeal to the general public and frequently Ayurvedic Pandits and Plant Collectors from various Pharmaceutical Firms consult these collections.

About 2,400 exhibits including seeds, fruits, barks, roots and other sources of indigenous drugs are housed in the Museum attached to the herbarium. There are also exhibits of paintings of economically important and useful plants.

The library attached to the herbarium contains 1,533 books including bound volumes of periodicals and 1,396 reprints. There are 45 periodicals on plant taxonomy and allied subjects. In addition to these, microfiches of the Linnean herbarium (831 cards) are also available.

ACTIVITIES

As stated earlier, a number of intensive

and extensive explorations were conducted from the Madras Herbarium from its foundation for enriching the herbarium. When Mr. J. S. Gamble began the compilation of the 'Flora of the Presidency of Madras' in 1913, most of the specimens kept in the herbarium were shipped to Kew in various consignments to be utilized for the preparation of the flora. The first part of the flora was published in 1915. After the death of Mr. Gamble, Mr. C. E. C. Fischer continued the work and the eleventh and the last part was published in 1936. Mr. K. Rangachariar and Mr. C. Tadulinga Mudaliar published 'Handbook of some South Indian Grasses' in 1920. Mr. Tadulinga Mudaliar and Mr. G. V. Narayana published 'A handbook of some South Indian Weeds' in 1932, which was revised and enlarged by Mr. Rajasekhara Mudaliar and Mr. J. Sakharama Rao in 1955. Besides, a number of valuable scientific papers, bulletins and pamphlets have emanated from

time to time from the herbarium on such useful topics like fodder grasses, soil binders, poisonous plants, weeds and green manure plants.

AFTER REORGANISATION OF BOTANICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

Since taking over of the Madras Herbarium, the Botanical Survey of India, Coimbatore has published 151 original papers (including 53 new taxa).

CURRENT PROJECTS

The State flora analysis of Tamil Nadu and district floras of Idikki and Kanyakumari are now under preparation. Also studies on Ferns of Kerala, Orchids of South India; and Indian Burseraceae, Aizoaceae, Celastraceae, Compositae (certain genera) and Combretaceae have been taken up under the flora of India Project.